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ABSTRACT

For decades there has been no formal evaluation system to ensure the quality of art teaching in Hong Kong. Additionally, although the syllabi for art are open and flexible, art teachers do not have adequate knowledge to develop a balanced curriculum. This study investigates what constitutes good art teaching and the extent to which art teachers can develop criteria for evaluating art teaching and use these criteria to reflect upon and improve their teaching. Three paths comprise the research: (1) preliminary interviews to establish a Hong Kong context for evaluating art teachers; (2) Part 1: a survey of secondary art teachers' perceptions of knowledge and competencies; and (3) Part 2: an action research project to test the working hypothesis that developing standards of good art teaching through reflective inquiry will help teachers to evaluate and improve their practice. Synopses are provided of the preliminary interviews and Part 1. Part 2 is discussed in detail. The paper explains the test module and the theoretical framework. The test module consists of four principles: (1) Good art teaching as a frame; (2) Practice-into-theory; (3) Dialogue journals as tools for reflecting on/improving practice; and (4) Developing and using standards of good practice for self evaluation. The paper discusses three themes that emerged from the study: (1) reflection on practice; (2) learning from peers; and (3) teacher change. (BT)

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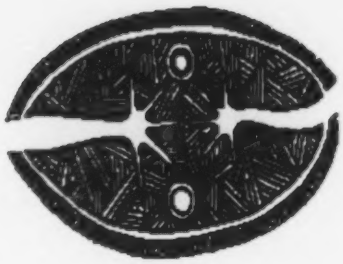

"An Alternative Approach to In-Service Teacher Education for Secondary Art Teachers"

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AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO IN-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION FOR SECONDARY ART TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on Part 2 of my research project on "Educational evaluation and professional development of art teachers in Hong Kong".

In over 10 years training teachers in Hong Kong I have become aware that many teachers have inadequate subject knowledge in art teaching. The syllabi for art in Hong Kong are open and flexible, but art teachers do not have adequate knowledge develop a balanced curriculum. A further problem is that for decades there has been no formal evaluation system to ensure the quality of art teaching in Hong Kong. In the prevailing system art inspectors visit schools every three to four years, but their role is limited to offering advice. Their criteria for good teaching have never made known to the teachers. So it is clear that to improve teaching and have accountability, there is an urgent need to establish standards of good practice for evaluation of art teaching in Hong Kong.

AIMS OF RESEARCH

The study aims to investigate firstly what constitutes good art teaching and secondly the extent to which art teachers can be helped to develop criteria for evaluating art teaching, and use these criteria to reflect upon and improve their teaching.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does literature suggest is good art teaching and how should it be evaluated?
2. How do Hong Kong secondary art teachers perceive good art teaching and evaluation?
3. What forms of subject and pedagogical knowledge do they need to function effectively in classroom settings?
4. How can proficiency standards be introduced into in-service teacher education in Hong Kong so as to improve current practice?

METHODOLOGY

The research comprised three parts:

1. Preliminary interviews to establish Hong Kong context for evaluating art teachers
2. Part 1, a survey of secondary art teachers' perceptions of knowledge and competencies
3. Part 2, an action research to test out the working hypothesis that developing standards of good art teaching through reflective inquiry will help teachers to evaluate and improve their practice

Preliminary study:

In a preliminary study of the Hong Kong context, 4 art inspectors were interviewed about the criteria of good art teaching and 5 art teachers were asked to give their opinions about the current evaluation system in Hong Kong.

Part 1: Survey of secondary art teachers' perceptions of knowledge and competencies

Once the review of literature on good art teaching and standards for evaluating art teaching had been conducted, I wanted to examine the views that a representative group of trained and experienced teachers working in Hong Kong secondary schools had on these issues. A questionnaire was sent to the 230 art panel heads to solicit their perceptions on good art teaching. The questionnaire inquired their views on i) the good art teacher; ii) important subject matter knowledge for art; iii) strategies to good art teaching; iv) dilemmas of teaching art; v) evaluation of art teaching. Teachers were asked to provide their metaphors of a good art teacher, good teaching and an ideal art room. The subject and pedagogical knowledge identified are being used as a platform for developing standards of good practice by in-service art teachers in part 2 of the research.

Part 2: Action research to test out the working hypothesis that developing standards of good art teaching through reflective inquiry will help teachers to evaluate and improve their practice

This second part of the research was therefore an action research project undertaken as part of a professional development course, which:

1) engaged 15 teachers at the Hong Kong Institute of Education with current knowledge about curriculum, teaching and evaluation and 2) encouraged them to reflect on and use this knowledge of best theory and practice to develop with me standards for good art teaching, and then to use this set of standards to evaluate their own teaching, and plan for more effective practice.

The re-constructed art education module operated with four principles:

1) **Good art teaching as a frame**

   The content of the module was organized, as far as possible, around the standards of good art teaching derived from international literature and from the findings of a survey on teachers' perceptions of good art teaching in Hong Kong (Au, 1997). The module was structured so that the teachers would have a holistic picture of good art teaching to reflect on. I had to take into consideration the current directions of change in defining the knowledge base in art education as well as the flux of change in the art curriculum in Hong Kong in the 90s.

2) **Practice-into-theory**

   In previous years I had followed local practice in putting a strong emphasis on major theories in art education, with the expectation that teachers would be able to work out ways of applying these theories in their own teaching. Having realized that this approach was not always successful, I changed my approach for the module that was the subject of this research. Instead I asked teachers to bring along issues they had in their art teaching and to share their successes, constraints and dilemmas. I also presented them with videos and written accounts of what overseas teachers had done in their classrooms and invited teachers to give their views on the appropriateness of the approaches and methods used. The aim was to present examples of practice so that the ideas underlying the practice could be more readily appreciated.

3) **Dialogue journals as tools for reflecting on and improving practice**

   In this module I wanted to help teachers develop a critical understanding of new practice and theory in literature, and to critically reflect upon their current teaching practice, with a view to making appropriate changes in such things as curriculum content and teaching approaches. So teachers in the module were asked to write 6 dialogue journal entries, corresponding to the following key issues in art teaching: 1) The good art teacher; 2) Content of the art curriculum; 3) Strategies of art teaching; 4) Instructional resources and learning environments; 5) Assessment, reflection and evaluation.

   In the journals teachers discussed issues from readings and class activities, and talked about what they did in their own schools. They evaluated their own beliefs and practice in the light of the criteria developed from standards of good teaching.

4) **Developing and using standards of good practice for self-evaluation**

   As part of the aim to encourage teachers to be critically reflective practitioners, I worked throughout the module to develop with the teachers a set of standards that they could use for evaluating their own practice. These were gradually built up from the readings, videos etc. that they discussed, and then at the end of the module were pulled together as a set of criteria for good art teaching. The standards used reflected my beliefs and values in art education. However, they addressed the issues relating to the following seven standards partially adapted from National Board for Professional Standards (1995) published by the National Art Education Association (NAEA): 1) Conceptions of art teaching; 2) Qualities of a good art teacher; 3) Content of art curriculum; 4) Strategies of art teaching; 5) Instructional resources; 6) Learning environments; 7) Assessment, reflection and evaluation

METHODS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework or structure for my study came from theory and research in three different areas of:

1. good art teaching and standards for evaluating art teaching;
2. teacher change and professional development for teachers;
3. differences between teaching and learning in Western and 'Confucian-heritage cultures' (Biggs, 1996)

The first part of the theoretical framework had to do with the nature of good art teaching – the areas of art

teaching that teachers need to consider in evaluating their teaching. I worked through the teachers' *six-entry dialogue journals* to determine the teachers' responses to the subject and pedagogic knowledge presented in the course. The aim was to determine the impact that this knowledge had on teachers' understandings about good art teaching.

The second part of the theoretical framework had to do with teacher reflection and change, and the nature of effective in-service education. In particular it had to do with the usefulness of an in-service course that focused on teachers developing a set of standards for evaluating art teaching, and then use these standards to reflect on and improve their teaching. One of the important issues here was to do with the willingness/unwillingness of teachers to reflect upon their current teaching and consider ideas which might lead to improved art teaching.

The third part of the theoretical framework became necessary when I realized that responses of art teachers in Hong Kong were different from the responses Western art teachers might make to new knowledge and strategies for art teaching. For this part, it is necessary to draw on theory and research on the differences in learning/teaching in Western cultures and 'Confucian-heritage cultures' (Biggs, 1996), found in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan. The aim was to understand the extent to which the views of teachers might be a feature of their context – Hong Kong's 'Confucian-heritage culture'.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In moving from raw data to conclusions I drew in part on techniques for managing data suggested by Dey (1993). This paper reports on only one part of the findings – that part which relates to the second framework, teacher reflection and change, and the nature of effective in-service teacher education.

Careful study of the teachers' comments produced three main themes:

1. Reflection on practice: The nature of the reflection encouraged by the in-service module and the extent to which the teachers reflected on their teaching.
2. Learning from peers: The importance of peer learning, something that has not been a strong feature of Hong Kong in-service teacher education.
3. Teacher change: The extent to which the module encouraged teachers to make change to their current practice.

Note: As the report of the study is still in progress, this preliminary report presents the key findings without linking them to a discussion of the literature on professional development.

Overall, the module allowed an opportunity for me to test my working hypothesis that developing standards of good art teaching through reflective inquiry will help teachers to evaluate and improve their practice. From analysis of the data in the interviews it is obvious that this professional development course did give them an opportunity for the teachers to reflect and examine their practice critically.

Theme 1: Reflection on practice

1.1 Teachers valued the opportunity to reflect on their teaching.

The need for reflection to improve practice in a teacher's career was well expressed by one of the teachers:

> *I assume the most experienced teacher is not necessarily the best teacher. If a teacher has never reviewed himself, then there is no difference between twenty years experience and one year. He has not shown any improvement. (Interview, 05)*

The teachers had built up a repertoire of pedagogical knowledge after years of experience in the classroom. One of them described how past experiences served as starting points for the act of reflection.

> *Our experience in teaching kept flashing back. We can remember examples from our teaching. (Interview, 02)*

Dialogue journals and standards of good practice proved to be effective in encouraging Hong Kong teachers to reflect on their teaching, as this interview excerpt suggests:

> *Since each journal has a different focus, such as "what is a good art teacher?", I would concentrate thinking about what constituted a good art teacher and my own capability as an art teacher. My thinking became clearer. My previous practice was to say things like, "This lesson is quite good." or "The response of the students is good." Or "My preparation is good." This [journal writing] is more focused. (Interview 10).*

Dialogue journals also provided a chance for these teachers to express themselves and respond to the teaching, reading and discussion in the sessions.

In the past, there were not many opportunities that we can give our opinions. This year is good in a sense we can use journals to talk and explore possibilities. There is a chance to talk, and not just to know, but to think about practical applications (Interview, 13)

1.2 Teachers became critical of themselves / critically appraised their teaching

It is clear from the data that almost all the teachers saw the module as an experience that made them look more critically at themselves and their teaching. Some came to see how unimaginative their teaching had been, often painfully facing up to what they now saw as inadequate teaching.

Why didn't my students listen to me? Possibly when students said that my teaching was boring it was because I had not given them enough coaching or they did not have enough time to think…. Now I realize my teaching was not too good. The problem is with myself, not the students. (Interview, 01)

My teaching before had little variation. Sometimes the repeaters in the class could find the same familiar teaching materials. I didn't want to change for just one student. I felt I had not moved ahead. (Interview 05)

In most cases, however, the recognition of what could have been became a strong impetus for change. Teachers were not always sure of the direction in which they should go, but they valued the opportunity to think critically what they were doing.

The journal gives me a chance to reflect on what I have been doing … If you are not engaged in thinking, you won't ponder and put new things into practice. (Interview, 09)

Art education for me in the past was finishing the lessons smoothly. That is you taught something and students finished something. To me a lesson was OK if students had visible learning outcomes. My thinking is different now. What you taught last year should be somewhat different from the previous year. Change of times, new technology and new trends will contribute some change in my teaching. (Interview, 08)

1.3 Teachers reflected upon possible new content and strategies

While there was a great variation in the levels of dissatisfaction expressed by teachers, an encouraging response to the module was that most teachers felt a sense of intellectual challenge, and all of them were excited about the possibility of new approaches and strategies. Teacher 05 was prepared to apply standards developed in the module to set a new goal.

I have not thought of what makes a good art teacher. Perhaps now when I look at the standards for myself, a good art teacher should be like this. Maybe after one year, I can ask whether I have attained the standards I set. This idea never crossed my mind before. (Interview, 05)

Similarly Teacher 02 expressed the view that 'a whole new world' was possible.

You have brought many new ideas that I haven't thought of, such as videos and new teaching methodology. I never imagined that art teaching could be like this. (Interview, 02)

Quite a few of the teachers were eager to take up the challenge of using information technology in their classroom.

I have used IT in teaching. Previously, I did not know how to turn on a computer. At the beginning, I did not set very high goals. I just wanted to use IT, PowerPoint. I wanted to see the response of the students. (Interview, 07)

We don't have to rely on the traditional reference books or do as the syllabus says. We only have to click the Internet and many different teaching methods and themes will appear. (Interview, 15)

Apart from Information Technology, teachers were interested in trying out new content / strategies in the area of Aesthetics, Art History and Assessment. For example, in talking about Aesthetics, Teacher 05 conveyed his / her enthusiasm at new ideas opening up.

It has never occurred to me that there are so many different strategies. For example, the video in the session demonstrates the process of teaching aesthetics. Previously, I thought it was difficult so I didn't teach this topic. My usual approach was to use slides to teach and ask students to go to see exhibitions. I never thought of such forms of activities. (Interview, 05)

Similarly in talking about Art history, Teacher 06 reflected upon his / her past 'boring' teaching but also reflected on alternatives, demonstrating a quiet confidence that Art History could be taught differently.

Before taking this course, my conception of teaching art history was similar to the methodology used in Chinese and Western history. It was just like "giving the year of birth, then reading the bibliography, followed by viewing slides [of the work of the artist]. If this is how art history is learnt and taught, I'll be bored too. After this module, I know there are many approaches to teaching art

history. It can be integrated with art making. I believe I can include more art history in the days to come. (Interview, 06)

Theme 2: Learning from peers

2.1 Sharing with each other in the course

Apart from their own self-evaluation and reflection on practice, teachers indicated professional exchange with peers was an important component of the module. Teachers enjoyed sharing their problems and issues with peers, and regarded such sharing as providing a different dimension from knowledge gained from books.

I think class discussion and sharing with others have more impact on me. You can read and understand from books but it is very different if you join in discussion. I treasure the sharing experience. (Interview, 05)

The class discussion were often a forum in which teachers could articulate their teaching philosophy and beliefs. It was my hope that our approach to sharing might provide a model that could help to loosen the rigidity of traditional Hong Kong teaching. My hope seemed to have been realized with Teacher 08, for whom our class had been an opportunity to learn about inclusivity and accepting different points of view.

[In class discussion], I can see different perspectives of my classmates. Each has his [her] point of view. I have learnt from the atmosphere, of being inclusive in accepting different perspectives. (Interview, 08)

It is interesting to note that the discussion in class often carried forth into after class debates and teachers benefited from learning from such sharing and exchange of experiences. A number of teachers saw this as an important benefit of the module.

After class discussion, we would continue to talk over meals. At least we flew ideas across, knew what others were doing, and how other teachers marked their assignments. (Interview, 10)

In the course, we have groups of teachers gathered together. We usually discussed in class or after class about how to teach and we exchanged ideas too. (Interview, 02)

2.2 Sharing with experienced teachers

One of the most popular sessions of the module was the class when three experienced teachers were invited in to share their experience with the teachers. The focus of discussion was how they bridged the gaps between theory and practice in their classrooms. Teachers in the module responded enthusiastically. They had talked about 'teaching behind closed doors' and appreciated this opportunity to share with three experienced teachers who demonstrated that it was possible to put into practice in Hong Kong many of the ideas of the module.

I think it is the sharing with teachers who came to our campus that has the greatest impact on me. They are very positive in their teaching attitude, and their enthusiasm in students and themselves. It left a deep impression. Before this we don't have a chance to have such an in-depth discussion with in-service teachers. (Interview, 11)

2.3 Sharing with teachers in school visits

Teachers also visited the art rooms of up to four other schools, selected on the basis of their excellence in technology, their preference for students strong in art, and their success in providing well for difficult students. This proved to be an illuminating experience for the majority of the teachers. Most of them were excited at seeing another teacher doing new things or things they themselves found difficult.

The most interesting part is the school visit. I have been to two schools. I feel you can't just look at your own school because I have been in the same school for so many years. You have to see the environment of other schools and the teaching there. (Interview, 12)

Theme 3: Teacher change

3.1 Teachers revised their assumptions and preconceptions

First and foremost, most art teachers in Hong Kong love the practical aspects of drawing, painting, printmaking, etc. At some point of their career, they regard themselves as artists. For most of the teachers in the course, the assumption that art education is art making was deep-rooted. Teachers 04 and 06 enjoyed teaching the studio art, but after this year they realized that there was more to art teaching than just the media and skills.

I can't think of any significant change but what I gain most is the understanding that art education is not just making. I have learnt also a lot of concepts in art education. (Interview, 04)

What came to my mind were students had to finish a product first that could be presentable to others. Now I think art is not just making a product. The conception and development of ideas are also important too. (Interview, 06)

Teachers in Hong Kong tend to be directive in teaching. They work hard to prepare well, making sure that

students do not miss any part of the syllabus for examination. Students are generally passive receivers of knowledge. The assumption that a teacher should provide everything to the students is common in teaching of all subjects. When teachers attempt to develop the spirit of self-inquiry, principals often think that teachers are not performing their teaching role properly. The realization that they need to put back the responsibility of learning to students proved a big step for the teachers in the course.

> *After the module, I realized that [in teaching] I don't have to provide everything, I can throw some ideas to my students. They can make decisions and think for themselves, not just being told what to do. It was my problem in the past. (Interview, 01)...*

> *If I don't ask them to search for information and bring their own materials, they will depend entirely on me, expecting to receive whatever I give. This will not suffice. Students should take the initiative to find information themselves or at least know where to find what they want. It is better than everything being provided by me. (Interview, 10)*

The assumption that good examination results mean good art teaching comes from the principals and the Hong Kong educational culture. The effectiveness of teaching in schools in Hong Kong is largely measured by public examination. As a consequence, what we seem to have is training for examinations rather than art education. Art teachers often have to face the dichotomy of a rigid examination-focused approach and a discipline-based approach to art teaching. Teacher 02 was one of the few teachers who willing to make changes in such a constrained educational system.

> *I found that my most significant change is the concept of teaching Form 4 and Form 5. I think a good art teacher should not just gain good results in public examination. This is only part of it. Art appreciation is very important. It is an eye opener that can broaden students' views of seeing art. We are like planting some seeds. (Interview, 02)*

3.2 Teachers grew in confidence

The data also revealed new confidence in curriculum planning and teaching for most of the teachers. Teacher 01, for one, had the confidence to try new content.

> *I have never included any Art history in my teaching. For a long time, I resisted teaching art history. Now I have the courage to teach because I have gained more knowledge and confidence. I have got the concept how to teach now. (Interview, 01)*

The teachers also began to demand more from themselves and their students. For a long time, art has been regarded as a peripheral subject in the curriculum. Sometimes, it has been used as a token for a comprehensive education. These teachers had demanded little from their students before and after lessons. However, the data from the interviews suggested a new confidence in demanding more from students (Teacher 06), to try more challenging teaching (Teacher 04) and to become more autonomous in decision-making (Teacher 11).

> *I did not set high expectations before because I dared not. I did not want to scare them and make them feel art is another difficult subject. In retrospective, lowering the expectations has not raised the standard of my students' artwork. On the contrary, the standard seems to become lower. (Interview, 06)*

> *Now I can go for another higher level, e.g. community art or local artists. (Interview, 04)*

> *Overall speaking, I am more certain of some areas. I know what is right and how this should be done. Sometimes when I am not sure, I'll follow her [panel head] way but if I am sure and that is right, I have the confidence to implement. (Interview, 11)*

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Looking back on my own teaching in the past, I became aware that I had been too preoccupied with theories in art education. Previously my teaching was organized, formal and teacher-directed. By presenting my sessions in lecture mode, I was able to pass on massive amounts of information, expecting teachers to utilize it in their classrooms. Often I bombarded them with journal articles on the current trends of art education in the west. The fact that many of the teachers were struggling to make sense of their teaching in difficult environments had not crossed my mind. Sometimes, I think as a teacher educator, I am living in a utopia.

We cannot teach out of context. In Hong Kong, as elsewhere, there are constraints against good art teaching. Teachers in Hong Kong have to meet administrative expectations. Their students are expected to sit quietly in a tightly controlled classroom. The quality of their teaching is judged by students' examination results. The art syllabus is less than ideal. The streaming of students into different bands labels. Teachers in the English medium schools have to use a second language to teach.

The teachers on my courses confront these problems daily. They need to invigorate themselves with new ideas and knowledge through professional development courses. They need emotional and intellectual sharing with fellow teachers. My concluding thoughts to date are:

1. Instead of theory on its own, we need to develop understanding of theory through examining what the theory looks like in practice. This includes teachers testing feasibility in their classrooms.
2. Teachers need some content to reflect on. Standards of good art teaching jointly developed in class sessions provide a framework for teachers to evaluate their practice.
3. Teachers learn more fully when they learn by sharing each other's experience and thinking. Time in professional development courses helps teachers articulate their experiences and concerns.
4. Dialogue journals are a powerful stimulus to reflection and change.

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